



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (9 p.m.): As the youngest woman ever to have won a seat in the Queensland Parliament, I am honoured by the opportunity to serve as the Opposition's spokesperson on health and women's policy. I am also proud to reiterate the record of the coalition in its two short years of Government, in which we turned Queensland's hospital waiting times around from being the worst in Australia to the best.

Already the Labor apologists and spin doctors are trying to talk down the coalition's achievements in the quest to create the Labor myth of a responsible socialist Government. There is no such thing as a responsible socialist Government, as we saw when Labor was last in Government. Today the Parliament is being asked to put its trust in another Labor Government, one which has suffered one of its worst results in history. Labor has shown by its rhetoric and its past history that it is a Government more about doing deals with people than about delivering credible and careful management of Queensland's core services. Queensland's most precious free hospital system is one of those core services and it is a service that Queenslanders treasure and defend with a passion.

I will address some of the whoppers that the new Labor Government is telling people in order to justify its upcoming Budget changes. First, I thank the new Health Minister, Wendy Edmond, for releasing the data today which confirms that more people received their surgery on time under the coalition Government than under the previous Labor Government. For the last couple of years the present Minister in her capacity as shadow Minister bagged my colleague the Honourable Mike Horan and ran down the Surgery on Time program. Yet a document that she released today proves what we were saying about the increased number of people receiving surgery and about the dramatic reduction in waiting times.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! I remind members that if they are going to interject they must do so from their correct seats.

Miss SIMPSON: I imagine that the Minister is eating more than a bit of humble pie today having released the 1 July 1998 waiting times which show that, compared with Labor's last results, thousands more Queenslanders have had and are having their surgery on time under the coalition's improvements. I am astounded that the Minister is sending out little smoke signals, that she cannot keep up the pace and that she is now looking for excuses as to why these key targets will fail under Labor.

Targets are important. If Labor really had a vision for Queensland it would publish its targets for waiting times in our public hospital system. It has not done so because, quite simply, it has no targets and it has no vision for the hospital system. It is looking for excuses at a time when it has been handed a \$103m windfall. With the smoke signals that the new Minister is sending out, she is trying to raise doubt about the in-principle agreement that was signed. She will have problems, because millions of dollars from that agreement have already been spent. I wonder whether the Minister is prepared to hand back those additional dollars.

Queensland really scooped the pool when it came to getting the best deal from the Medicare Agreement. Not only did the coalition improve Queensland's position compared with the Goss Labor Government, under which we suffered a loss of something like, from memory, \$140m or \$180m; it also scored something like \$103m out of \$120m nationally in additional incentive funds. It seems that the

new Minister is looking for excuses to weasel out of keeping those important targets in Surgery on Time which Queenslanders have come to expect.

Mrs Edmond: Tell us about the funding for Noosa and Robina.

Miss SIMPSON: I will come to that, because it is very important. When Labor comes to Government it tries to create this myth of responsible Government by telling a few whoppers. Certainly a lot of Labor whoppers have been told with regard to the Noosa and Robina projects, which are still under way. We know that, as these hospitals are still being built, the operating funds are not put into this Budget, because otherwise there would be funding for doctors and nurses at a time when the foundations are still being poured. The coalition has a good track record of providing initiative and growth funding for new projects. Hervey Bay is just one example.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Health!

Miss SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am getting used to these new standards of interaction in the Chamber by the Labor Government. Those opposite do not like the truth. When the coalition came to Government there were something like 130 beds in the Hervey Bay Hospital. We had to fund the improvements out of initiative and growth funding, and we did it. We increased the health funding in three Budgets by about 30%—something like \$900m. That is our track record of delivering on initiative and growth funding.

Queenslanders have a lot more funded health infrastructure today than was delivered under Labor. If we look at the Labor Party's record we find that there was a significant unfunded component to its Capital Works Program. In fact, it was something like \$1.2 billion. I will come back to that a little later.

We have these smoke signals from the new Health Minister, who is trying to weasel out of delivering the very important key targets for Surgery on Time in Queensland. I will read out some figures to give the House an idea of where things were at under the former Labor Government. I will focus on Category 2, because these are some of the most significant figures that have been released recently. Category 2 is semi-urgent surgery; Category 1 is urgent surgery. Category 2 is surgery which is clinically recommended to be delivered within 90 days.

As at 1 July 1996, Cairns Base Hospital, one of the 10 hospitals in the Surgery on Time program, had something like 45% of people waiting longer than clinically recommended for Category 2 surgery. Under the coalition Government, as a result of the progress made with the extra funding, as at 1 July this year the percentage of those waiting longer than 90 days was 0.8.

At the Gold Coast Hospital, as at 1 July 1996 more than 34% of people were waiting longer than they should have for Category 2 surgery. Under the coalition, as at 1 July 18.9% were waiting longer than they should have. The percentage of those waiting at Ipswich Hospital has reduced from nearly 45 as at 1 July 1996 to 9.3. The percentage of those waiting at Nambour Hospital has reduced from about 25 to 0.8.

I know that there are hospital staff who are very upset about being accused of fudging these figures. We know that these are professional people. It is not bureaucrats and it is not politicians who recategorise people and determine whether people should be in Categories 1, 2 or 3. That is something which is purely in the hands of the clinicians. They are the ones who determine whether people rest within Categories 1, 2 or 3. I am particularly proud to see the great job that Nambour Hospital has done. I do know that there are staff who are quite offended by stories in the newspaper suggesting that they have fudged the figures.

We saw another phenomenal improvement with respect to the Rockhampton Base Hospital. As at 1 July 1996, under the system that Labor had set up more than 51% of people were waiting longer than they should have for Category 2 surgery. Under the coalition system, as at 1 July that figure had come down to 3.1%. That was well within the target. The figure for the Royal Brisbane Hospital was 26%. As at 1 July 1998, it had come down to 4.6%. We have to give credit where it is due. We know that the coalition put in a lot of extra money.

I have talked to some of the staff who have been delivering those services. They are proud of what they have achieved. They know how tough it is, and they have done an outstanding job. We should not try to take away from them what they have achieved. We can go on. The figure for the Townsville General Hospital was 62.25%, which was an absolutely disgraceful waiting time. More than 62% of Category 2 patients were waiting longer than they should have been waiting for their surgery. Under the coalition's system, that figure has fallen to 6.1%.

The coalition had a plan and it went about implementing it. Labor now comes to Government and is awash with Medicare funding, but it is now trying to make excuses as to why it cannot meet that target. This just shows us that this is the same old Labor Party Government. I do not think they feel comfortable about having money that they can spend on the health system. I think they feel

comfortable only when they do something similar to what they did with the WorkCover system, in respect of which this Government's new Health Minister presided over a \$400m blow-out. Obviously, they feel comfortable only when they are dealing with debt. We have handed them quite a deal of money with which to successfully manage the health system, but they cannot handle it.

An Opposition member: They'll blow it.

Miss SIMPSON: Of course they will blow it. All socialist Governments blow it.

Let us turn to Mrs Edmond's predecessors as Health Minister. Not only did Beattie and Elder blow it; we are still paying off the debt that Beattie and Elder left for Queensland Health.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member will refer to other members by their correct title.

Miss SIMPSON: The last instalment of that \$24m debt was due to be paid off in this Budget, and I am assuming that the new Government will continue to pay off the debt that the new Minister's predecessors left Queensland.

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members who wish to interject will do so from their correct seats.

Miss SIMPSON: I return to the Noosa and Robina hospitals. Clearly, the operational funding of those hospitals was to be funded in future Budgets out of growth and initiative money. We have proved that we could do it. We built Hervey Bay, with 130 beds, out of growth funds. That is very significant. Labor has a history of wanting to downgrade the Maryborough Base Hospital, as our friends in Maryborough know.

Government members interjected.

Miss SIMPSON: They are trying to downgrade it. They have done it before and they are trying to do it again. The reality is that we put in extra funds to maintain and increase the number of services at the Maryborough Base Hospital and also to bring on line the Hervey Bay Hospital. We did that; we brought it on line out of growth funds.

In looking at the track record of the former coalition Government, it is very important to look at some of the other projects that we also brought about through growth and initiative funds. I turn to the QE II Hospital. It was an absolute disgrace that the previous Labor Government allowed the QE II Hospital—that wonderful hospital—to at one stage be reduced to about nine beds. When the coalition came to Government, we were able to increase that number to about 160 beds through growth and initiative funding. That is a greatly appreciated improvement in that local community. Once again, we delivered.

Let us look at some of the other projects that we were able to fund out of growth and initiative funding. We have only to look at the Royal Brisbane Hospital Psychiatric Unit, the Rockhampton Psychiatric Unit and the Nambour Psychiatric Unit, which were also funded——

Mr Schwarten: We built a psychiatric unit in Rockhampton.

Miss SIMPSON: Is the honourable member who interjected wanting to be committed? The reality is that there has been a significant increase in funding, and we delivered on these things. Our track record is there for all to see.

I wish to touch on another coalition initiative. We could say it is flattering, but I think it is a little ungracious for Peter Beattie to take the credit for himself. I refer to the Cancer Research Centre. I noticed that within about five minutes of coming to Government he was claiming that he put that deal together. This project was birthed under the coalition. It was certainly announced during the coalition's time—in June—by then Premier Borbidge and then Health Minister Horan. The Opposition fully supports this project, because it represents a significant advancement for cancer research and education in this State. As I said, when there is a change of Government it seems that members opposite like to grab the things that other people have spent a lot of time and work on. Something like \$10m worth of State funds are involved in that project and there are also quite significant private industry funds.

I wish to speak about aged care, an issue in respect of which we will be watching the new Government with a great deal of interest. Previously, it signed the aged care agreement that stripped aged care beds out of this State. Under the previous Borbidge coalition Government, we were the only State that did not charge up-front fees for nursing homes. I am very proud of that, because that was the right decision. In addition, we have also spent increased funds on bringing those aged care facilities up to standard, because they are a very important community asset.

We are the only State that also continued to fund the abolished Federal Government national dental program. We funded that program to the tune of \$20m a year. We also distributed a \$24m increase to the \$125m in HACC funding over two years, ensuring that 94,000 elderly Queenslanders

received home and aged care services, which is up from the 74,000 who received HACC services in 1995 under Labor.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Miss SIMPSON: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Furthermore, we allocated \$38m in capital works to upgrade State-owned nursing homes and hospital aged care facilities. Under our 1998-99 coalition Budget, we also proposed a \$4m increase to Statewide funding for key medical specialties affecting the elderly, including orthopaedics, ophthalmology and urology, as part of the coalition's Surgery on Time program. We also proposed \$1.4m in funding for the establishment of a school of nursing to specialise in aged care nursing in partnership with the Princess Alexandra Hospital and the Queensland University of Technology's School of Nursing.

In putting on my hat as the women's policy spokesperson, we can look at the very significant targets and funding that went into the following areas. Public breast screening was expanded by about 25%. Child immunisation rose by some 81%, which is now the highest rate in Australia. Those are very important targets.

This Labor Government has no targets by which we can measure its performance. All it has done is come into Government and criticise the previous one. It has not come up with a plan for how it will make the health system better. We will be watching members opposite and calling for accountability with respect to this minority ALP Government. I remember well the time when we sat in this Chamber and heard the foaming and spewing from the Labor Party when it was tossed into Opposition. We were a Government that came to power with no majority but certainly with the vast support of the voting public of Queensland. The last Parliament was not an easy one. I acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the member for Gladstone. So much was achieved in that very short time.

It is history now that we sit on the Opposition benches once again. However, we will not forget what Labor did to the State of Queensland. We will not forget the fact that it ran down the Police Service. Under Labor, we lost a significant number of police on the Sunshine Coast. The people of the Sunshine Coast will also not forget the fact that Labor promised to take away the tolls on the Sunshine Motorway but, upon its coming to Government, gave us an extra two tolls. We will not forget that it was the coalition that delivered on its promise to remove those tolls.

We will also not forget the terrible mess that happened in the health system. Queensland's free public hospital system is the jewel in the crown of the core services of the Queensland Government. That is something that we must fight to protect when Labor Governments come to power. I certainly will not be supporting a vote of confidence in the new Labor Government, but I certainly will be working with my colleagues to bring about greater scrutiny of this minority Labor Government. We will not be deterred by the Labor Party apologists who would try to have us forget the Labor Party's history in Queensland.
